DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 182 352 UD 019 639

TITLE Education of Ethnic Minorities: Comments on the Consultative Document Issued by the Department of Education & Science on the Report on the West Indian Community Issued by the Select Committee on Race Relations & Immigration. Occasional Paper No. 1.
INSTITUTION Commission for Racial Equality, London (England).
PUB DATE Oct 77
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement: *Educational Needs; *Educational Opportunities; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education: *Equal Education; *Minority Group Children: Primary Education; Research Proposals
IDENTIFIERS *Great Britain: *West Indian Children

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the Commission's views on the scope of a proposed inquiry into the educational underachievement of West Indian children and into other aspects of the education of ethnic minority children in general. Objectives and suggestions for meeting these objectives in the proposed inquiry are outlined. These include: (1) basic skills in primary schools; (2) the placement of West Indian children in special schools: (3) the recruitment and training of ethnic minority teachers; and (4) funding needed for meeting the educational needs of ethnic minority children. Recommendations are made concerning the development of a professional monitoring system which would record the numbers and progress of particular ethnic group children in the educational system. Special aspects to be considered in such a monitoring system at the primary and secondary educational levels are described. An argument is also presented calling for the classification of racial groups as a basis for assessing achievement, locating need and ensuring equal opportunity in education for minority groups. (EB)

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Education of Ethnic Minorities

COMMISSION FOR RACIAL EQUALITY

ED182352

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COMMENTS

on the Consultative Document issued by the Department of Education & Science on the Report on the West Indian Community issued by the Select Committee on Race Relations & Immigration

UD019639

A memorandum from the Commission for Racial Equality, October 1977

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(a) working towards the elimination of discrimination;

(b) promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups generally; and

(c) keeping under review the working of the Act, and, when required by the Secretary of State or when it otherwise thinks it necessary, to draw up and submit to the Secretary of State proposals for amending it.

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Education of Ethnic Minorities

Occasional paper No.1

COMMENTS

on the Consultative Document issued by the Department of Education & Science on the Report on the West Indian Community issued by the Select Committee on Race Relations & Immigration

Commission for Racial Equality
Elliot House

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INTROCUCTION

1. The Commission welcomes the Secretary of State's willingness to set up an inquiry into the educational under-achievement of children of West Indian origin and into other aspects of the education of ethnic minority children in general. This paper sets out the Commission's views on the scope of such an inquiry and on other points raised by the DES's consultative document.

I THE INQUIRY

(a) Terms of Reference

2. The subject proposed for inquiry by the Select Committee was the causes of under-achievement of West Indian children in schools. The consultative document puts forward the following areas as possible extensions to the terms of reference:

   (i) the comparative achievement of different ethnic groups;

   (ii) the educational needs of ethnic minority groups;

   (iii) the education of all pupils for life in a multi-racial society.

   Our comments on these are as follows:

Should the inquiry be extended to cover the comparative achievement of different ethnic groups?

3. Available evidence suggests that under-achievement relative to the population as a whole is particularly significant among West Indian children, and the difficulties experienced by these children have been well described in the evidence given to the Select Committee. An inquiry directed to West Indian children would have the advantage of concentrating on the most serious educational problems among the most seriously affected of the minority groups.

4. We believe that this should remain the main focus of the inquiry but that consideration should also be given to the educational achievements of other ethnic minorities. They also face distinctive disadvantages and there is some evidence, for example, which suggests that while the average levels of achievement may be the same for some groups as for the population as a whole, there may be marked differences in the range and distribution of achievement. Comparisons between different ethnic groups (including indigenous white pupils) would no doubt help to determine the most important factors involved. Moreover it would seem to be relatively simple in practical terms to extend the inquiry in this way.

Should the inquiry be extended to cover the educational needs of ethnic minority groups?

5. It might be argued that it would also be sensible and practicable to extend the inquiry to cover the educational needs of ethnic minority groups as well. However, it is important to distinguish between two broad categories of 'need'.

6. First, there is the need to acquire, through education, basic skills and knowledge, with the appropriate formal qualifications, developed to the full potential of each individual child. In this respect, the educational objective for ethnic minority children is no different from that for all children, though in the case of ethnic minority children special arrangements may be needed to achieve it. An examination of these needs would therefore be an essential aspect of an inquiry into achievement generally, and would not be an extension of the inquiry already proposed.

7. Second, there are widely held views that ethnic minorities have different and special needs related to education in language, religion, history and culture aimed at promoting or maintaining ethnic identities and culture. While these issues cannot be completely separated from the issue of educational achievement, they raise fundamental questions of a very different nature.

8. While recognising the importance of these questions, we believe that if the inquiry were extended to cover them it would be too diffuse, and in our view it is essential to concentrate on the most urgent single problem, the under-achievement of children of West Indian origin. We therefore **recommend** that this second category of need should only be considered insofar as it is relevant to the issue of ecuational achievement. This category of need would be appropriate, however, to a separate inquiry.

Should the inquiry be extended to cover the education of all pupils for life in a multi-racial society?

9. Major developments in education for a multi-racial society cannot take place until there is greater clarity about and agreement on its nature and purpose. This would involve detailed study of curriculum and teaching materials and methods and consideration of many other issues related to education of ethnic minorities and matters affecting the wider community. Much of the value may be drawn from the experience of other countries (e.g. Canada, the United States, Israel and Holland) in these matters. We consider it to be vitally important that greater clarity and understanding be achieved, and appropriate national and local policies developed and implemented. We suggest, however, that this is a qualitatively different matter from the terms of reference proposed so far, and would, if included, make it impossible for the inquiry to report on those more limited but crucial issues in a reasonably short time. We **recommend**, therefore, that the second category of educational need discussed above, and education for a multi-racial society should be the subjects of a separate inquiry, carried out under the aegis of a committee which would be as representative as possible of the community generally.

We recommend that the terms of reference of the immediate inquiry should be to investigate the range and distribution of achievement of ethnic minority pupils in schools, with particular reference to the incidence, extent and causes of under-achievement among pupils of West Indian origin and with the purpose of recommending the types of remedial action where appropriate.

(b) **Style and methods of inquiry**

10. We support the proposals to establish an **independent Committee** of Inquiry. We regard it is as essential that this Committee should include members from ethnic minority groups. It will clearly be necessary to collate and analyse existing knowledge and informed opinion on the subject matter of the inquiry. We feel, however, that in addition to receiving evidence the inquiry should be designed to secure new knowledge where this is necessary. The inquiry will need data on actual levels of performance of different groups, which are available to a very limited extent. But much more needs to be known about the institutional response to ethnic minority pupils and it is on this aspect that the inquiry's attention should be most strongly focussed. It is suggested that more should be known about such matters as: the teaching of basic skills in primary schools; the teaching of English as a second language and the relationship of this to normal educational development; methods of assessment of performance and the gap between the potential of ethnic minority group pupils and their achievement; the relevance of teacher training; the relationship between ethnic minority pupils and white teachers and the effects of teachers' attitudes on achievement. Attention should be paid to whether there are variations in achievement between different areas of minority group settlement, and if so what the reasons might be.

11. Pre-school experience is a further important area for inquiry and research. Much recent research has demonstrated that children placed with untrained or unsupported child minders while parents work may be extremely vulnerable. It is sometimes suggested that, if a child's development before the age of five is hindered by inadequate child-minding practices, his later education will present particular difficulties. Child-minding is a major institution for the care of pre-school children, particularly for working class families. The targets for pre-school education and day care provision thought desirable by the Plowden and Finer Committees are far from being realised. We **recommend**, therefore, that the inquiry should consider this issue and the possibilities for improving standards of child-minding and other provision of d day care services.

12. As has already been indicated, some if not all of these matters would involve the inquiry not only in the receiving of evidence but also in first-hand research. The research will inevitably take time to complete and require considerable resources and it may not be possible to deal fully with all issues within the scope of a single inquiry. We **recommend** therefore that sufficient resources be made available for professionally conducted and where necessary large scale research to be carried out under the aegis of the Committee of Inquiry. These research studies may not be completed for some time and, if this is the case, we suggest that the Committee should first produce a report on its preliminary findings to be followed by a later report on the longer term projects.

II BASIC SKILLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

13. We support the Select Committee's recommendation that special measures be taken to improve the teaching of basic skills in primary schools where there are large number of West Indian children, and have indicated above (para. 10) that research on this matter will be required for the purposes of the inquiry. We consider it most important that teacher training should equip teachers to understand the special needs which some minority group children will have while avoiding stereotyping and the consequent dangers of self-fulfilling expectations, and in this respect it will be important for the inquiry to consider teacher training and the effects of teachers' attitudes and expectations, as suggested in para. 10 above. Similarly, we agree with the Select Committee on the importance of the transition from primary to secondary education. This will be an important item in a monitoring system (see below), but is an issue we believe the inquiry should consider specifically.

III WEST INDIAN CHILDREN IN ESN SCHOOLS

14. We **welcome** the Department's statement that it will consult the local authorities most concerned about the position of West Indian children in ESN schools. But it is our view that a detailed inquiry may be necessary. Relatively little is known about the characteristics of West Indian children in ESN schools compared with other children in those schools, and there are grave doubts about whether the assessment and diagnostic methods used are as relevant or accurate in the case of ethnic minority as in that of indigenous white children.

15. The danger of misplacement and self-fulfilling expectations is likely to be greater in the case of ethnic minorities than other children. Similarly, little is known about the experience of West Indian children in ESN schools, the extent to which they benefit, and the relative prospects of return to normal schools. There is considerable variation between LEAs in how they diagnose the need for special (ESN) education, and the arrangements they make for the education of children who have been assessed as educationally sub-normal. This too requires examination if the position of West Indian children is to be fully explored.

IV RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF ETHNIC MINORITY TEACHERS

16. We **welcome** the Government's views as expressed in the Consultative Document and the recent Green Paper on the need to make efforts to increase the number of West Indian and other ethnic minority teachers.

17. In the short term, the strategy of encouraging the training of mature students and people with overseas qualifications could be pursued more vigorously. For the longer term, an inquiry into why relatively so few members of ethnic minorities enter the teaching profession may be needed. Careers advice in schools may be an important factor. Consideration should be given to the development of specially close contacts between schools with significant proportions of ethnic minority pupils and teacher training colleges. A policy of special encouragement and training should, if adopted, be monitored to see how successful it is in attracting people into training, how many teachers qualify, what teaching positions they take up and in what areas.

V FUNDS TO MEET EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

18. At present the form of funding provided to LEAs under Section 11 of the local Government Act covers the limited purpose of employing additional teachers. Its use depends on LEAs identifying the need for additional staff: this leads to a situation where the fund is unevenly and unequally applied. The Urban Programme, which is the other source of funds, is not designed to meet any particular need; the funds are spread over a very wide range of activities, not all specifically directed at meeting educational needs.

19. In view of this, we consider that there is a case for funds to be made available to LEAs for needs broader than Section 11, but much more specific than the present Urban Programme. This might be met by a more flexible central fund to meet ethnic minority needs specifically.

20. The type of fund required was outlined by a working party of educationalists convened by the former Community Relations Commission. The working-party report proposed that the scale of financial assistance

should be increased to cover what is currently being expended on minority education but not reclaimable, and to cover additional expenditure incurred by local authorities in order that they should provide a more adequate service to give ethnic minority pupils an equal opportunity to succeed.

VI MONITORING

(a) System of Monitoring

21. We **recommend** that a system of professional monitoring be devised for schools and LEAs which would serve the following basic functions:

    (a) enable the relative levels of performance and progress of different ethnic groups and the incidence of under performance to be analysed;

    (b) provide a basis for determining the areas and extent of special provision which might be needed, and measuring the effectiveness of special provision in improving performance;

    (c) provide a basis for identifying areas in which further, more detailed inquiry may be needed;

    (d) provide a basis for comparing the relative performance of successive generations of ethnic minority pupils in order to assist in the planning of teaching policy and practices.

22. We suggest that a fairly simple monitoring system be devised which could be based on records showing the ethnic origins of all pupils (see below), place of birth, age of entry to the education system, and mother tongue. The purpose of this would not be merely to ascertain the numbers of each group in the system, but to allow the educational progress of each group to be monitored. The items to be monitored should reflect all the crucial aspects of the acquisition of basic skills and progress towards and achievement in public examinations and formal qualifications. We **recommend** that the specific items to be recorded and analysed for each ethnic group should be:

Primary education

(a) all assessments of progress in the acquisition of basic skills made at the end of each year should be recorded and analysed by ethnic group. It may also be of assistance to schools to have records of detailed observations made of children at the time of admission, and any subjective assessment of potential made during the initial period after admission. It is recognised that, in the first three years, assessments will be mainly or exclusively subjective, and care should be taken within schools to ensure that these are not influenced by consciously or unconsciously biased attitudes towards certain ethnic groups. In the fourth and subsequent years, the recording of the results of scored tests in reading and numbers will provide more 'objective' measures of progress.

(b) in the case of children from non-English speaking backgrounds, it is of crucial importance that their language difficulties should be professionally assessed and appropriate training given, and that there should be continuous monitoring of comprehension and fluency after any initial period of special language training.

Secondary education

(a) assessment on entry into secondary school and allocation to streams, classes, etc.

(b) performance at end of each year (or possibly, first, third and final years) of compulsory secondary education.

(c) CSE/GCE 'O' level entries and the subjects and grades achieved.

(d) continuation after age 16 in school or Further Education College: 'A' levels entered for; subjects and grades achieved.

(e) continuation in Further Education/Higher Education after age 18.

It may be sufficient for such data to be collected for the intake of every second or third year, though points (c), (d) and (e) would require annual monitoring since these represent the culmination of compulsory education.

23. This approach would not allow any sophisticated analysis of factors affecting performance such as background variables and variables particular to specific ethnic minorities, but it would satisfy a number of basic criteria. It would enable schools, within each year for which data are collected, to compare general levels of achievement for each group and identify areas of under-achievement where special steps may be needed. Over time, it would enable the progress of each group to be followed through the school, and the effectiveness of the school in maintaining and improving relative levels of performance to be monitored. It would enable LEAs to identify needs for special provision or resources in schools within their area and to measure their effect, and assist LEAs in developing long term policy.

24. A more sophisticated form of monitoring would be based on detailed personal records showing all background variables thought to affect educational performance generally (occupation and social class of parents, family size and type etc.) as well as variables particular to ethnic minorities (language spoken at home, whether or not born in this country, age of entry to the education system). Measures of performance would be correlated against these variables at various points during the school career of pupils for each ethnic group and the school population as a whole in order to identify the most important factors in determining variations in performance and to measure the effectiveness of both general and special provisions. Such a procedure would, however, require sophisticated records and analytical methods which are likely to be beyond the capacity of most schools and LEAs and therefore might be inappropriate to a system of continuous monitoring. However, they would be appropriate to detailed research projects carried out as an adjunct to monitoring and we suggest that sample research along these lines would be of considerable value.

25. While we fully believe in the value of local records kept for the puposes of monitoring as described, we are more doubtful about the need for and value of monitoring of this kind on a national level; although there may be a need for the DES to have statistics on the numbers of ethnic minority children in schools for the purposes of allocating funds, mere 'counting' of this kind is a quite separate exercise from monitoring. There is little point in developing a statistical league table of educational performance of different ethnic groups unless this would have value for the pruposes of national education policy. It may be sufficient if LEAs are persuaded to monitor as suggested, for the results of this monitoring to be passed to the DES for further discussion and consultation as necessary. The DES should be responsible for analysing the findings of LEAs generally and for taking any appropriate action. Moreover it would be helpful if the CRE could have access to LEAs findings.

(b) **Classification of Racial Groups**

26. We recognise the delicacy and complexity of this subject but take the view that LEAs and schools should make a firm decision in favour of such classification as a basis for assessing achievement, locating need and ensuring equal opportunity in education for minority groups.

27. What is required is a reasonably simple means of classification which would enable monitoring to proceed without excessive distortion of findings. We have already recommended (para. 22) that place of birth, age of entry to education, and mother tongue should be recorded, in addition to ethnic origins. The following additional points might be made:

    (i) For 'Asians', it will be necessary for some finer distinctions to be made until at least such time as there is shown to be no significant variation between definable groups. Place of birth and mother tongue may be a sufficient basis for classifying pupils of Asian origins. However, religious groupings or country of origin may prove useful additional criteria.

    (ii) For 'West Indians', the question arises as to whether a collective category is sufficient, or whether a more detailed classification by island or country of origin is relevant for educational monitoring purposes. It is suggested that a single category would be sufficient and that no purpose would be served by attempting to distinguish between West Indians of African, Asian, European and other origins.

    (iii) There are many other groups for which monitoring will be relevant in particular areas. There may, for example, be a need to distinguish Greek and Turkish Cypriots, pupils of various recent European immigrant origins, Africans and East African Asians. In some cases, pupils of such origins may be too few to require separate monitoring except in an 'other' category. It may be necessary also to place some pupils of mixed origins in an 'other' category and special consideration may have to be

given to classification in some areas (particularly Liverpool and Cardiff) where the history and circumstances of minority group settlement are not typical of the country as a whole.

28. The basic methods of identifying the origins of pupils are by observer classification or classification by self or parent. It is suggested that the underlying principle should be one of classification by parents, and that the purpose of the classification should be clearly explained. Ideally, the classification would take place in an interview with the parent on or shortly after the child's entry to primary school (there should be no further need to re-establish origins). In practice, this may not always be feasible, and a form, translated as necessary, may have to be used for completion by parents. Absolute accuracy and completeness will not be essential since monitoring will be concerned with the range and distribution of achievement of groups of pupils rather than the performance of individual pupils. It is essential to note that no general monitoring system of the kind outlined would explain the performance of individual pupils nor should the performance of individuals be ascribed to their ethnic origins. Monitoring of the performance and potential of individual pupils would remain, as at present, a function of teachers.

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